

Meet Peppercorn, using cutting-edge conversational AI to change the car insurance experience

As part of our quick fire questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Nigel Lombard, CEO and cofounder of Peppercorn about re-inventing insurance by using conversational AI to put the customer in control.

I founded two insurtechs prior to *Peppercorn*. The last one was set up to have no inbound call centres and we started experimenting with a rudimentary chatbot that provided customers with basic answers to queries. During this time, I saw that customers were embracing the technology and were happy to interact with digital messages, even with a basic platform that provided standard answers. At the same time, there was a lot of talk happening about conversational AI and its potential. I started Peppercorn because I could see that conversational AI could be a Darwinian leap to take this further, having deeper elevating the customer experience and creating efficiencies at the same time.

Tell me about the business – what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

Peppercorn is a company that's using AI to change the insurance model. Our conversational AI assistant replaces traditional forms that customers use to purchase insurance. This puts the customer in control of the conversation, which results in a more personalised user experience. This process means that customers get a better understanding of what they're purchasing and can ensure they're getting the most appropriate cover by asking questions and engaging with the platform, rather than using a one size fits all approach like a form. And they're able to do so when it suits them, without having to wait on hold to speak to someone on the phone. Not only does this create a better customer experience, but it creates efficiencies, which can be passed back onto customers.

How has the business evolved since its launch? When was this?

I founded Peppercorn three years ago with an idea that had the potential to turn the insurance model on its head. For the last seven months, our team has been focused on our product launch and last month, we started trading on Confused.com. Within a month of launching, we have an average 4.7 TrustPilot [NL1] score and an average 4.9 Google score, with customers saying the platform has been easy to use, painless and quick.

Tell us about the working culture at Peppercorn

The thing that really stands out about Peppercorn is the team. We have a fully remote workforce of 27 people in all four home countries. We're incredibly fortunate that we've been able to assemble a team of experts in insurance, technology and customer experience and crucially, a balanced blend of technology and insurance. And in the same way that we empower our customers, we empower our people, giving them the flexibility to work how and when suits them.

How are you funded?

In April 2022, we secured £1.8M in seed funding from EHE Capital.

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

Like any new tech platform, one of the biggest challenges so far has been getting the product ready for market. Our team managed to get our product up and running within seven months, without compromising on quality, which is impressive.

How does Peppercorn answer an unmet need?

Car insurance started being sold online about 20 years ago, but the market has barely changed since then. That's because the insurance industry has tied itself to systems and processes that have been purposefully designed to favour providers. We started Peppercorn because we believe the insurance industry can be turned on its head by empowering customers. Conversational AI is the technology that enables this, which also makes the platform more personalised and user friendly.

What's in store for the future?

We've just started trading our conversational AI insurance assistant – which is the world's first – on Confused.com and we want to focus on building out our functionality even more. Our next step will be delivering an Insurance-as-a-Service offering. We'll likely look at offering other types of insurance down the line.

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

Your team is your superpower.

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

The Peppercorn model is full home-working with occasional in-person get-togethers. Therefore, the majority of the time is working from home.

as for my daily routine, I'm an early bird and, I confess, I do check our business performance very first thing on my phone, even before my coffee and breakfast. Then check there are no urgent things on Slack or email. Ideally, I'll jump on the rowing machine before starting work too.

As for rules...

Take breaks, stand-up, drink plenty of water

Try and take a walk at some point, which I find really helps with clearing the head and coming up with ideas and solutions to problems

Try and keep work in a separate room, so the door can be closed and create a bit of separation

I also use a priority list of aims for the day too.

Nigel Lombard is CEO and cofounder of Peppercorn.

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